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ABSTRACT

This review of recent research offers practical suggestions for maintaining discipline in the classroom. The first half discusses, in outline form, techniques for preventing classroom disruption, action to take when problems arise, and when to use punishment. The second half examines specific ways to deal with student misbehavior. An outline lists cause of the misbehavior, prevention tactics to use, and recommended remedial action. (Author/LD)

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CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE: RECENT RESEARCH

by Anthony P. Mattaliano

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I. INTRODUCTION

The ultimate aim of discipline is to help develop human beings who can reach their maximum potentials intellectually and socially without trampling on the rights of others. The idea that only democratic pupil-teacher relationships are compatible with positive mental health and personality development in children has come into disrepute recently (Ausubel, 1971).

Recent studies have made it quite clear that either extreme authoritarianism or permissiveness in school or at home has some very unwholesome results. Teachers need wise, sensible, humane, down-to-earth ways of dealing with classroom behavior.

In a famous study conducted by Koumin (1970), it was found that teachers considered successful disciplinarians by their colleagues had the ability to prevent and avoid problems. They had no more ability than others to deal with problems after they occurred.

This paper will present and integrate some contemporary research on classroom discipline. Hopefully, it will lend itself to ready translation from the theoretical to the practical, so that it may be instantly useful to the classroom teacher.

II. DISCIPLINE

A. Prevention

1. Increasing your self-awareness.

   To know what you are, to be what you are, and to let the students see you as you are are all-important. The congruence of your real and ideal selves prevents the receiving of double messages by the students. Much conflict and tension in the classroom are the result of students' perceptions of differences between what the teacher says and what is his/her actual belief (Curwin and Mendler, 1980, p. 22).

2. Increasing your awareness of students as individuals.

   a. Many misbehaving students come to you feeling that their parents and their school are not interested in them. They don't respect authority and they are very hard to like. This may cause a teacher to scold and scream, which in turn causes the student to show defiance (his/her self-protection against feeling powerless).

   b. Teachers need to know how individual students feel. Students need to know it's o.k. to tell you the good and the bad feelings they have.

   c. An interest inventory filled out by your students at the beginning of the school year is an effective way to increase your awareness of your students. The particular interest inventory shown should be modified to meet the needs of children at different grade levels and in different circumstances. (See following page for Interest Inventory.)

INTEREST INVENTORY
(adapted from Stellern, Vasa and Little, 1976)

Name _____ Date _____

1. What do you like to read? _____

2. What are three things that coming to school means to you? _____

3. What are your hobbies or favorite interests? _____

4. If you could spend your time doing anything you want, what would you do?

5. The thing that I want most from this class is _____

6. The best reward anybody can give me is _____

7. Name your favorite grown-up._____

   What I like best about this person is _____

8. When I do well at school I wish my teacher would _____

(contd.)

INTEREST INVENTORY
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9. When I do poorly at school I wish my teacher would _____

10. The other kids in this class _____

11. My sisters and/or brothers _____

12. The class in which I learned most was _____

13. Name three things that people do to punish you. _____

14. How well do those punishments work? _____

15. I will do almost anything to avoid _____

3. Expressing feelings.

Learn to express your feelings. Bottling them up can have some seriously negative outcomes in your relationships with students.

Here is a "fantasy dialogue" which can help you to express your feelings and feel a lessening of tension, of being more in control, and which can give you a sense of completion:

FANTASY DIALOGUE

> Set up a fantasy dialogue with an identified student with whom you are having trouble. Use an empty chair and imagine the presence of the student sitting in the chair. Let the student know exactly how you feel. Tell him all the things he does that you resent and how you feel about them. Don't hold back. Let yourself scream, yell, shout, cry, be as unprofessional as you want to be. Remember, he's not really there. After you have finished expressing your resentments, make some demands. "I demand that you _____." And, finally, share any appreciations you have for him and how you feel about these. When you have finished this process, switch chairs and become the student. As the student, tell the teacher your resentments, demands and appreciations. Continue your fantasy dialogue until you feel a sense of completion (Curwin & Mendler, 1980, p. 69).

4. Discovering alternatives and acquiring skills.

a. Behavior modification.

Behavior modification, a very powerful behavior-shaping technique, has become popular almost overnight. In behavior modification, students' behaviors are shaped by the teacher's positive and negative reinforcements. These general principles are followed:

(1) the teacher models appropriate behavior

(2) desirable student behaviors are praised (verbally and non-verbally) so that rewards become connected with desirable behaviors

(3) the teacher uses negative reinforcement when student's behavior is undesirable (the child is always allowed to terminate punishment when he/she is ready to behave properly)

The teacher who wishes to use these techniques effectively will need to study them in depth and will also need to practice the necessary skills. The following are suggested for study:

Bandura, A. Principles of Behavior Modification. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969.

Epstein C. Classroom Management and Teaching. Reston, Va.: Reston Pub. Co., 1979.

Walker, J. and Shea, T. Behavior Modification: A Practical Approach for Educators. St. Louis: C.V. Mosby, 1976.

b. The Human Relations Model.

Since 1965, a group of humanistic psychologists have been developing techniques which emphasize personal interaction, communication and democratic processes in teacher-student relationships. Here are some basic principles of the human relations model:

(1) respect and politeness are accorded to all students

(2) the teacher describes rather than evaluates

(3) the teacher reflects his/her feelings to the student(s) about students' actions

(4) the teacher gives "I Messages"

(a) describe the student's behavior

(b) state the effects of the behavior

(c) state the feeling you have about the behavior

Again, as in behavior modification, the human relations approach must be studied in depth and the skills practiced if it is to be used effectively. The following books are suggested for study:

Ginott, H. Teacher and Child. New York: Macmillan, 1972.

Glasser, W. Reality Therapy. New York: Harper and Row, 1965.

Gordon, T. Teacher Effectiveness Training. New York: Wyden, 1974.

Purkey, W. Inviting School Success: Self-Concept Approach to Learning. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1978.

5. Basic teaching skills and attitudes.

Recent literature on the prevention of discipline problems is in agreement that certain teaching skills and attitudes brought by the teacher tend to reduce the incidence of discipline problems in the classroom. They are as follows:

a. firmness and consistency

b. involvement and enthusiasm

c. "withitness" (the ability to monitor and be aware of what is going on in all parts of the classroom at all times)

d. students should perceive the teacher as likeable, caring, credible, trustworthy and generally attractive

e. wise and conscious use of praise (praise does not automatically function as a reward; some students find it embarrassing or otherwise uncomfortable and therefore it acts as punishment to these students; praise should be delivered naturally,

honestly, with specificity, and when possible it should be delivered in individual, private contacts with the student (Brophy and Evertson, 1976)

6. Establishing a social contract.

   a. making rules and setting consequences: set rules (just a few) at the beginning of the year and set up the consequences for rule-breaking

   b. consequence should be:

      (1) clear and specific

      (2) related directly to the rules

      (3) designed for the student to learn "cause and effect", not as punishment

B. Action (When something happens! It will!)

1. Implement the consequence.

   a. for simple violations: enforce the consequence quickly and simply (but not mechanistically).

   b. for repeated violations of one particular rule: rewrite the contract after group discussion, if necessary.

2. Caution!

   a. avoid: scolding, lecturing, taking away privileges, sending student to the office .

   b. do: take action, state the rule and the consequence, use proximity control (get to within 5-6 feet of the student). NO BARGAINING!

3. Make alternative consequences. Save the more drastic ones for later. Here is an example:

   a. reminder

   b. warning

   c. student must stay in seat for fifteen minutes

   d. student must come back after school for a conference

   e. a call home

If a consequence doesn't work, don't use it again! Move on to the next one! (Try to start fresh each day.)

C. Serious Problems

1. Find out what the problem is. It is especially important for teachers to get over being easily offended, since students who present serious problems often cause overly-sensitive adults to react emotionally.
2. Find out background information.
   a. previous referral to core team?
   b. known special problem?
      self-image, learning disability, emotionally disturbed, family problems, etc.?
   c. achievement problems?
      lack of prerequisites, lack of basic skills, can't do the work, etc.?
3. Decide where to get help if you need it.
   a. personnel; principal, team leader, counsellor, reading specialist, core team leader, etc.
   b. helping structures: time-out area, in-school suspension, alternative programs, advisor-advisee program, etc.
   c. violence cannot be tolerated; the administrator should be notified of any serious violence immediately.

D. Punishment

Almost every teacher will have to use punishment or threats of punishment to some degree. Consequently, it is important to understand some basic information about punishment and to know how to use it effectively. Among the most important points to keep in mind are the following:

Punishment is a stopgap measure to suppress misbehavior, and is not a solution to a problem by itself.

Nevertheless, it is sometimes necessary because persistent student misbehavior leaves no alternatives.

When used, it should be used in a deliberate, systematic way as a method for suppressing misbehavior. It should not be an involuntary emotional reaction, a way to get revenge or vent frustrations, or a spontaneous reaction to provocation that has not been thought out.

Ideally, it should be threatened before it is actually used, and the threat should be presented in a way that makes it clear to students that the teacher hopes that it will not have to be used and that the students will be fully responsible if it is used.

The punishment should be as short and mild as is possible.

However, it should function as punishment (that is, it should be sufficiently unpleasant to the students to motivate them to change their undesirable behavior).

Ideally, the punishment should be combined with positive statements of expectations and behavioral rules, focusing more on what the students should be doing than on what they should not be doing.

The punishment should be accompanied with sufficient explanation to make it clear to students why the rule exists, why their misbehavior cannot be tolerated, why they have left no alternative other than punishment, and what the alternatives are at present.

Ideally, the punishment should be somewhat open-ended, structured so that students must do something positive to show good faith and escape it (for example, simply stating that the student will lose some privilege for a specific period of time probably is less effective than stating that the student will lose the privilege until behavior improves sufficiently to warrant removal of the punishment).

This last feature again helps drive home the point that students are responsible not only for bringing punishment upon themselves, but also for escaping it. At the same time, it provides them with specific information about what kinds of changes in behavior will be required.

If teachers have followed all these guidelines, they probably will be using punishment effectively, and there will be no reason for them to feel guilty for doing so. When students leave no alternatives, punishment is a student problem, not a teacher problem. This is important for teachers to remember, because many feel guilty that they have been forced to rely upon a stopgap measure of last resort, and feel that they have failed because their previous problem-solving efforts have failed. Disappointment is understandable, but there is no reason for teachers to feel guilty if they have behaved appropriately and the students really have brought the situation upon themselves by leaving no alternative. (Good and Brophy, pp. 117-119)

III. STUDENT MISBEHAVIORS

A. Categories

CATEGORIES	EXAMPLES OF SPECIFIC ACTS
AGGRESSION	fighting, bullying, calling names, throwing things
DEFIANCE	refusal to obey, talking back, refusal to talk or move
SEEKING ATTENTION	teasing, clowning, showing off, aggravating others
DISHONESTY	cheating, stealing, lying
GENERAL UNRULINESS	calling out, laughing, shoving, stomping feet, making faces
TALKING	talking to neighbor, humming or mumbling to self, whispering, interrupting
INATTENTION	daydreaming, doodling, playing with object, squirming, reading something else

B. Dealing with each category

CAUSE OF MISBEHAVIOR	PREVENTION TACTICS	ACTION TACTICS
1. learning tasks:		
FATIGUE: students become tired; need a rest or change of activity	assign work more within the capabilities of students; help them with difficulties; plan short work periods with frequent change of activity; capitalize on students' special interests; use puzzles, novelty, movement, challenges, games, competition	change activities if necessary; add interest; help with difficulties; make mid-lesson changes
BOREDOM: students' interest is not held by the activity		
FRUSTRATION: activity too difficult resulting in hostility, aggression, withdrawal or apathy		
2. the teacher:		
VOICE: teacher's voice is weak, grating, whining or students can't hear	check for proper volume, pitch and quality of voice through recordings or requested observations; check if students understand directions; treat students fairly, as individuals with warmth and humor; question, listen, give constructive criticism and rewards; involve students in planning and evaluation	alternate talk periods with periods of quiet when no one talks; ask misbehaving students if they understand directions; increase and improve verbal interaction; ask students to make suggestions for desirable changes in lessons
LACK OF CLARITY: students do not know what is expected so they sit idly or do inappropriate things		
INCONSISTENCY: teacher lax one day, strict the next or does not treat students fairly. Students are unsure about the limits of acceptable behavior and are often resentful about "unfair" treatment		
POOR CLASSROOM CLIMATE: misbehaviors occur in a psychologically "cold" classroom where rewards are few and where students and teacher are not cooperatively involved in activities		

CAUSE OF MISBEHAVIOR	PREVENTION TACTICS	ACTION TACTICS
3. the student:		
IGNORANCE: students don't know what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior	cooperative formation of rules and consequences and periodic review; reward appropriate behavior; discourage imitation of misbehavior; become aware of students' backgrounds	review class conduct rules and consequences; institute consequences of escalating drastics; use incentives and praise to establish good behavior habits; isolate chronically disruptive students; punish when necessary with deprivation and restitution
HABIT: habits acquired outside of school can cause misbehavior in school		
MIMICRY: students imitate each other (this can be contagious)		
DISPLACEMENT: aggression or defiance may be the result of a broken home, tyrannical parents or not receiving love at home; these students often seek attention in undesirable ways		
4. other causes:		
SPECIAL EVENTS: holidays and other special events often excite students and make them more boisterous and difficult to control	avoid formal lessons on the afternoon before a holiday; use high motivation activities in anticipation of holidays; have them ready for use in emergencies	when misbehavior occurs in these circumstances, have students diagnose "what went wrong"; plan procedures to eliminate future misbehaviors
THE UNEXPECTED: weather changes, fire drills, visitors, etc., can unsettle students so that they can't work as originally planned		

IV. SUMMARY

Human behavior is a complex matter, and the principles of human behavior are a subject for continuing study.

Those principles of human behavior that we have come to understand are powerful allies in our quest as teachers to (a) help our pupils to be self-actualized, and (b) retain our sanity.

We have had trouble implementing the principles of behavior we already know. An important need in our profession is to be able to translate known principles into practice. At the same time, we must be responsive to new findings of theoreticians in the field of human behavior, since new understandings may lead to new opportunities for the self-actualization of our students and ourselves.

Understanding human behavior and keeping those understandings directed into useful channels requires incessant research, undiminishing effort and our best creative thought.

We do know that the vast majority of teachers are working hard for a better world. They are probably our greatest hope and they need our best help!

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